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ABSTRACT

The use of an assessment center in identifying specific staff development needs of aspiring and practicing school principals was studied. The relationship between assessment center performance and subsequent staff development activities was studied by participant level (elementary, middle and junior high, and high school) and by participant experience (aspiring and practicing). Areas of exceptional performance and areas of needed improvement were also determined for 12 dimensions of administrative leadership by assessment center participants. The sample included 109 participants in the Center for Assessment of Administrative Performance at the University of Washington (Seattle). Data were derived from written records of participants and from surveys completed by 94 of the participants. A limited relationship between assessment center results and subsequent staff development activities was found for all participants, by level, type of school, and experience. The percentage of participants who received excellent ratings on all dimensions of administrative leadership was low. The following areas of need are identified: (1) resourcefulness; (2) decisiveness; (3) creativity; and (4) judgment. Recommendations are made to improve assessment centers and make them a useful method of sharpening the professional skills of principals and those aspiring to be principals. Four tables present study data. (SLD)

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"RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN METHDOLOGY FOR ADMINISTRATOR ASSESSMENT CENTERS"

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USING ASSESSMENT CENTER RESULTS TO DETERMINE SUBSEQUENT STAFF DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES FOR PRINCIPALS

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Everett (Washington) School District
A.E.R.A. Annual Meeting
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INTRODUCTION

Assessment centers use simulations and exercises to assess leadership skills and behaviors of individuals and can be used to specify areas of needed professional growth. Feedback given in assessment centers has the potential for changing behavior. The literature supports the need for increased knowledge of the assessment center process and for clarity and specificity in the feedback to individuals. The manner in which evaluative feedback is given and then responded to are critical elements of assessment center activities. The subsequent selection of professional growth activities rests with the credibility the individual gives to the feedback he or she receives and with the opportunities to improve that follow.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

This study investigated the use of an assessment center in identifying specific staff development needs of aspiring and practicing principals. Assessment center performance information and written surveys were used to gather and record data from participants in The Center for Assessment of Administrative Performance (located at the University of Washington).

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The primary purposes of this study were to determine the relationship between assessment center performance and subsequent staff development activities by participant level (elementary, middle/junior high and high school) and by participant experience (aspiring and practicing), to identify sources of information and to identify factors that are most often used by assessment center participants to determine attendance at staff development activities. Another purpose was to identify areas of exceptional performance and areas of needed improvement performance on twelve Dimensions of Administrative Leadership by assessment center participants.

DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE

The study's procedures involved using a population of 109 participants in The Center for Assessment of Administrative Performance between the dates June 21, 1988 and June 6, 1989. The participants were practicing and aspiring principals in the state of Washington. They represented elementary, middle/junior high and high school levels (Table 1).

METHODOLOGY

Research instruments used in this study included The Center of Assessment of Administrative Performance participant records of each individual's scores on the twelve Dimensions of Administrative Leadership and a written survey mailed to participants during November and December 1989 and January 1990. Survey questions asked about subsequent staff development activities on the twelve Dimensions of Administrative Leadership,

staff development information sources and factors determining attendance at staff development activities.

The study's variables included:

1. Dimensions of Administrative Leadership
   - Instructional Leadership/Supervision <D_1>
   - Human Relations Competence <D_2>
   - Judgment <D_3>
   - Organizational Ability <D_4>
   - Educational Values <D_5>
   - Oral Communication <D_6>
   - Written Communication <D_7>
   - Problem Analysis <D_8>
   - Creativity <D_9>
   - Decisiveness <D_{10}>
   - Group Leadership <D_{11}>
   - Resourcefulness <D_{12}>
2. Amount of Staff Development Activities (as measured by number of hours of activities) (Inservice)
3. Level of Participant Experience (Experience)
   - Aspiring principal
   - Practicing principal
4. Grade Level of Participant (Level)
   - Elementary
   - Middle/junior high
   - High school
5. Staff Development Information Sources (Sources)
   - Supervisor
   - College catalogs and mailings
   - Subordinates
   - Parents or community
   - Professional organization
   - Project LEAD
   - Other source
6. Factors Determining Attendance (Factors)
   - Offered at a convenient time/location
   - Self identified need
   - Identified as area of need by supervisor
   - Identified as area of need by Assessment Center Feedback Report
   - Salary schedule or certification requirement
   - Need identified by staff survey or feedback
   - Other factor
7. Exceptional performance
8. Strong Potential for Improvement performance

Statistical analyses included use of Pearson correlation coefficients, frequency distributions, rank order, and Chi Square analysis.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The data analyses showed that there were only a few significant differences between elementary, middle/junior high and high school level participants and between aspiring and practicing principals. This was true for the relationship between assessment center rating on the twelve Dimensions of Administrative Leadership and subsequent staff development activities completed on those dimensions. It was also true of both Exceptional performance and Strong Potential for Improvement performance on the Dimensions of Administrative Leadership measured by The Center for Assessment of Administrative Performance. In addition, this was true of the Sources of Information and the Factors used to determine staff development activities. (Table 2)

In this study, a limited relationship between assessment center results and subsequent staff development activities for all participants, by level and by experience was found. There were significant negative relationships found on the dimension of Decisiveness for all respondents, for elementary participants and for aspiring principals. A significant negative relationship was found for elementary participants on the dimension of Organizational Ability. A significant negative relationship was found for middle school participants on the dimension of Written Communication. A significant negative relationship was found for

practicing principals on the dimension of Educational Values. There were significant positive relationships found for middle school participants on the dimensions of Creativity and Resourcefulness.

The four Dimensions of Administrative Leadership on which Assessment Center participants most often demonstrated Exceptional performance were Oral Communication (43.1%), Decisiveness (37.6%), Written Communication (30.3%) and Group Leadership (26.6%). There was one significant difference by level on Exceptional performance on the dimension of Human Relations. Middle/junior high school and high school participants scored significantly more often in the Exceptional range than elementary participants.

The five Dimensions of Administrative Leadership on which Assessment Center participants most often demonstrated Strong Potential for Improvement performance were Creativity (54.1%), Problem Analysis (50.5%), Educational Values (44.0%) Organizational Ability (41.3%) and Instructional Leadership (41.3%).

There was little difference in the Sources of Information most often used by participants to select staff development activities for themselves by participant level or by participant experience. One exception was that aspiring principals used Project LEAD significantly more often than practicing principals. The four Sources of Information most often used by Assessment Center participants to select staff development activities were

Professional Organizations (88.3%), Supervisor (58.5%), Project LEAD (41.5%), and College Catalogs and Mailings (41.5%). (Table 3)

The Factors that are most often used by participants to determine attendance at staff development activities differed very little by participant level or by participant experience. Self Identified Need (94.7%), Offered at a Convenient Time or Location (52.1%) and Need Identified by Assessment Center Feedback Report (45.8%) were the most commonly used Factors. High school participants used Supervisor Identified Need as a Factor significantly more often than elementary or middle/junior high school participants. (Table 4)

Professional Reading was the most commonly identified type of staff development activity used by Assessment Center participants. Workshops were the second most commonly used type of staff development activity.

The four Dimensions of Administrative Leadership that participants identified most often as having staff development activities available included Instructional Leadership (99%), Group Leadership (94%), Educational Values (89%) and Organizational Ability (85%).

The four Dimensions of Administrative Leadership that participants identified most often as having no staff development activities available were Resourcefulness (23%), Decisiveness (26%), Creativity (21%) and Judgment (21%).

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study's findings and conclusions form the basis of the following recommendations.

1. There is a need for the creation and expansion of staff development programs that focus on the twelve Dimensions of Administrative Leadership measured in The Center for Assessment of Administrative Performance activities. Specifically, this study identified areas of need as Resourcefulness, Decisiveness, Creativity and Judgment. However, because the percentage of participants who received excellent ratings on all of the twelve dimensions was low (ranged from 0.9% to 43.1%.), all dimensions should be included in staff development programs.
2. An analysis or assessment of current skills should be a part of any professional development plan. Assessment center feedback provides specific information which, when combined with other evaluative information, can help in developing a professional development plan.
3. The value of and use of the assessment center to practicing and aspiring principals needs to be presented carefully considering the participant's current status and professional development needs. Practicing and aspiring principals vary as individuals in their professional competencies and approaches to learning. A variety of formats should be made available to them. These activities should be advertised in a variety of ways.

4. Participants should identify specific and continuing goals and complete a career development plan that considers the detailed feedback from the assessment center report.
5. The importance of professional organizations and colleges as sources regarding potential inservice offerings was identified by this study's participants. Because of their role as clearinghouses of information on principal staff development activities, cooperative efforts to coordinate information and opportunities among these organizations and colleges should be developed.

It is estimated that nearly half the school principals will be retiring in the 1990s. In the remainder of this century, recruitment and selection of principals will consume an increasingly greater share of education's resources. As a result, improved training and selection practices need to be made a focus. Schools are designed to serve students. To carry out that assignment, school districts must look for creative, practical ways to assist the person who has the greatest impact on a school, the principal. Assessment centers offer a useful method of sharpening the professional skills of principals and those individuals aspiring to be principals.

Table 1

Study Sample by Level, Experience, and Gender and Percentage of Survey Respondents/Nonrespondents

	Total of Participants		Survey Respond.		Survey Nonrespond.	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
By Level						
Elementary	56	51.4	49	87.5	7	12.5
High	28	25.7	21	75.0	7	25.0
Middle	25	22.9	24	96.0	1	4.0
Total	109	100.0	94	86.2	15	13.8
By Experience						
Aspiring Principals	81	74.3	68	84.0	13	16.0
Practicing Principals	28	25.7	26	92.9	2	7.1
Total	109	100.0	94	86.2	15	13.8
By Gender						
Female	60	55.1	52	86.7	8	13.3
Male	49	44.9	42	85.7	7	14.3
Total	109	100.0	94	86.2	15	13.8

Table 2

Summary of Results of the Study Related to Assessment Center Rating and Subsequent Staff Development Activities

		Level			Experience	
Dimension	Total	Elem.	Middle	High	Aspiring	Practicing
Instr. Leadership(D1)	P	P	P			P
Human Relations (D2)						
Judgment (D3)	N					
Organiz. Ability (D4)	P	-R,P	P	P	P	
Educational Values (D5)	P	P		P	P	-R,P
Oral Communication (D6)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Written Comm. (D7)	X	X	-R,X	X	X	
Problem Analysis (D8)	P	P	P	P	P	P
Creativity (D9)	P,N	P	R,P	P	P	P
Decisiveness(D10)	-R,X,N	-R,X	X	X	-R,X	X
Group Leadership (D11)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Resourcefulness (D12)	N	P	R			X

Note. P - Strong Potential for Improvement (rank 1-4)
X - Exceptional Performance (rank 1-4)
R - Significant correlation between Assessment Center rating and subsequent staff development, (- negative)
N - no staff development opportunities (rank 1-4)

Table 3

Summary of Ranking of Sources of Information Used by Respondents to Select Staff Development Activities

		Level			Experience	
Information Sources	Total	Elem.	Middle	High	Aspiring	Practicing
Professional Organizations	1	1	1	1	1	1
Supervisor	2	2	2	2	2	2
College Catalogs/Mailings	3.5	3	4	3	4	4
Project LEAD	3.5	4.5	3	4	3	6
Subordinates	6	6	5	5	6	4
Parents/Community	7	7	7	7	7	7
Other	5	4.5	6	6	5	4

Note. Number appearing in cells = rank

Table 4

Summary of Rankings of Factors Used by Survey Respondents to Determine Staff Development Activities

		Level			Experience	
Factors	Total	Elem.	Middle	High	Aspiring	Practicing
Self Identified Need	1	1	1	1	1	1
Convenient Time/Location	2	2	2	2.5	3	2
Assessment Center Report	3	3	3	2.5	2	5
Salary/Certification Requirement	4	4	4.5	5.5	4	6.5
Staff Feedback	5.5	5.5	6.5	5.5	6	3.5
Supervisor Identified Need	5.5	7	4.5	4	5	6.5
Other	7	5.5	6.5	7	7	3.5

Note. Number appearing in cells = rank